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# DID JESUS TEACH CHRISTIAN SOCIALISM?

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*Two currents are just now to be seen in the general course of discussion over the ethics of Jesus. The one finds in his words essential principles of morality practically unconditioned by the messianic expectations of his contemporaries. The other current of interpretation regards Jesus as committed to the belief in the speedy end of the world. From this point of view his ethics would be intended only for the brief age that elapsed before the great catastrophe, or, to use the technical expression, "ad interim." The bearing of the first conception upon social theory has been very generally developed in America, as for example in Professor Peabody's volume JESUS CHRIST AND THE SOCIAL QUESTION. The "ad interim" theory has never been thoroughly worked out. This article by Professor Arbuthnot is almost the first discussion of the bearing of this important change of estimate. It can hardly be expected that all of our readers will agree with its position. We expect to publish further articles in the field of the social teaching of Jesus during the course of the year. In the meantime we should be very glad to receive comments from our readers upon the general position taken in the following discussion. In order to give point to such communications we should be glad to have them answer such questions as: "Would a more thoroughgoing criticism of the gospels distinguish more precisely than has Professor Arbuthnot between the teaching of Jesus and the conceptions of the evangelists?" "If it should be admitted that Jesus expected the speedy end of the world, would the principles of an 'ad interim' ethics be applicable to an indefinitely long social evolution?" "Would an unprejudiced criticism of the Synoptic Gospels lead us to the conclusion that Jesus expected the end of the world to come in the lifetime of his generation?"*

*The present article has special value in that it seems to distinguish sharply between the moral attitude that should result from sympathy with Jesus and some particular economic theory as to how this attitude can best find expression.*

The fundamental forces molding human history have been the religious and the economic interests of men. There is therefore nothing peculiar in an approach by way of religion to a study of the problems that have to do with the material means of life. It would be remarkable if the two could be separated by any great distance in fact, however they may seem to be at times to consciousness. There is a substantial belief that a man's reli-

gion ought "to have something to do with his private life," and the growing conviction is that economic conduct is a very considerable fraction of life.

In the difficulties of modern, complex social relationships a conscientious effort to catch the thread running through the maze has led devout men to think in terms of religion toward unraveling the entanglement in which they find themselves. There is, indeed, nothing new

in this except the increase in the tendency. The group of Christian Socialists and the departments of social service in various churches are expressions of the belief that economics and religion ought not to be put asunder.

The spiritual force behind these activities lies in the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth in their relation to modern economic problems. Men search the Scriptures because in them they think they have the key to economic life. The four gospels have been examined so often and so thoroughly with this end in view and the substance of the text stated so frequently from so many different angles that hardly an apology remains for another attempt. There may be, however, something worth while in the uncritical treatment of the gospels as documents reporting the teachings of Jesus and the study of them from the economist's point of view primarily, having in mind a restatement of the Master's economic program and its significance today.

The general discussion will be easier of apprehension if it is allowed to fall into three divisions with a question to be answered in each. Jesus spoke to the men of his time, a fact so obvious that it is not kept in mind as it should be when his words are studied. With an eye open to this neglected truth, the first query is in respect to the economic content of his teaching to his generation as reported in the gospels. To understand any teaching one ought to know what are the fundamental ideas in the teacher's mind, his presuppositions, his intellectual background. His thinking as a whole must be grasped if any part of it is to be understood aright. In the pres-

ent instance so much depends upon what Jesus meant by the expression "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" that the matter must be taken up as the second point of concern. Finally, an answer is to be attempted to the question touching the obligation laid upon modern Christians by their Master's words. What is undertaken here is to answer three inquiries:

a) What was the economic content of the teaching presented by Jesus *to his generation* as reported in the gospels?

b) What was the fundamental conception represented by the expression "The kingdom of heaven is at hand," upon which this teaching rested?

c) What is the obligation laid upon modern Christians by this teaching?

## **I. The Economic Teachings of Jesus to His Contemporaries**

In attempting to answer the first question the substance of the passages bearing on the theme may be summed up under several group heads. A careful collation of the material in the four gospels that touches immediately or remotely upon the subject under discussion indicates that it may be arranged under six main titles with the addition of a series of miscellaneous passages that are to be considered more or less individually. These main divisions concern benevolence, the poor, the rich, property, the economic position of Jesus, and the economic miracles.

With the text so familiar, it is sufficient, doubtless, to cite the references in a note and point out in a few paragraphs their economic content. In such manner may be taken up the topic of:

### 1. Benevolence<sup>1</sup>

When John the Baptist came, preaching the gospel of the new kingdom and demanding repentance, the people were moved and asked what they should do. "He answered and said unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath food, let him do likewise." In thus joining the objective, material demonstration of men's identity of interest with those in need with their subjective, spiritual relationship to God, John prepares the way for much of the teaching in the succeeding pages of the gospels.

When one reads through the gospels even casually, he is impressed with the emphasis laid upon benevolence; when he reads carefully, he is struck with the imperative obligation placed upon those who had wealth to share with those who had not. The abundance of the generosity demanded—not merely to give of one's superfluity—came as a hard saying to the well intentioned and thrifty. To give to those who asked; not to demand what had been borrowed; to lend without expecting to receive again; to sell what one had and give alms; to give dinners to those who needed them; to do as the widow who cast into the treasury all of her living; to do as the rich young ruler was bidden; to do what Zaccheus did; to be taught to do these things staggered the hearers of Jesus' words. If this abounding giving had been suggested in a rare passage or two, or depended on a turn of phrase or the meaning of a preposition, the provident, by mental dexterity, might have slipped off the burden of the obligation. But

the injunctions occur in all parts of the first three gospels, and are so much in the spirit of related passages respecting the treatment of the poor that the candid student can come to no other conclusion than that Jesus taught his hearers that they should share their good things with their needy neighbors with a generous hand—generous without limit other than the need that presented itself and the property available.

Obviously this extraordinary beneficence would benefit the recipients, but Jesus accented the good that would come to the giver, and the injunctions to liberality are accompanied by promises that the reward should be great; that good measure should be measured in return; that the Father should recompense them, especially in the resurrection of the just; that they should have treasure in heaven. If one were obliged to distribute the emphasis, he would be inclined to say that Jesus' words laid the stress upon the good that would be received by the donor rather than the recipient; in short, that his teaching in the gospels is expressed in his saying, quoted by Paul, when he urged the elders at Ephesus "to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Moreover, the blessing was to come to the secret giver from the Father who seeth in secret.

His making benevolence a test of admission to the kingdom shows impressively the trend of Jesus' ideas respecting an economic expression of sympathy.

The absolute size of the gift was not

<sup>1</sup>Luke 3:11; 6:30-38; 12:33; 14:12-14; 10:25-37; 18:22; 19:8-9; 21:1-4; Matt. 5:42; 6:3; 10:42; 19:21; 25:31; 26:7-13; Mark 9:41; 10:21; 12:41-44; 14:3-9; John 12:1-8.

of much consequence to one who spoke as he did of the widow's mites and a cup of cold water.

The defense of Mary when the disciples complained of the "waste" of wealth in pouring the precious ointment upon his head is of interest as a suggestion that he did not think that giving to the poor was the only or the most fitting disposition of property at all times. He seems to have said something in favor of the ceremonial or aesthetic use of wealth, the objection of the practically minded to the contrary notwithstanding.

The exhortations to benevolence as a matter of course are not to be separated from the texts that have to do with the poor.

## 2. The Poor<sup>\*</sup>

One cannot turn from a reading of the verses having to do with the economically unfortunate without a sure sense of the tenderness for the poor and distressed that fills the pages of the gospels. One needs to refer to but a few passages to convey the feeling that pervades the writings of the first three evangelists. They represent specifically what the careful reader will find implied throughout. From the time Mary sang:

My soul doth magnify the Lord,

For he hath looked upon the low estate  
of his handmaiden,

The hungry he hath filled with good  
things,

there is constantly held out the hope of better things to come for those in need.

Perhaps it is this spirit that inclines one to reconcile the Beatitudes in Matthew and Luke on the basis of Luke's report. "The poor" were likely to be "the poor in spirit" and "the hungry" may well have been "they that hunger after righteousness." For them a better day is dawning is the promise. When John asked for Jesus' credentials, part of the reply was, "The poor have good tidings preached to them." The rich young ruler was asked to give all his goods, and Zaccheus was praised for offering to give half of his possessions, to the poor. The needy were to be bidden to the feasts that might be made, and their hosts were to be recompensed in the resurrection. The future blessedness of the beggar Lazarus is dramatically portrayed; and there is extended the invitation, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

The only exception to this boundless sympathy and generosity toward the poor is the one previously noticed in Jesus' defense of Mary when she was criticized for wasting wealth in anointing him; and this, obviously, does not modify the rest of the teaching.

Coupled with the expressions of sympathy with the poor are significant utterances touching

## 3. The Rich<sup>\*</sup>

The Magnificat, in one line, sounds a note of promise to the hungry, and, in the next, bursts forth in a tone ominous to the rich. In Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount there is another

<sup>\*</sup>Luke 1:48-53; 6:20-21; 7:22; 14:13-14; 16:19-31; 19:8; Matt. 5:3-6; 11:4, 28; 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8.

<sup>\*</sup>Luke 1:53; 6:24-25; 8:1-3; 10:38-42; 16:19-31; 18:24-27; 19:1-10; 23:49-52; Matt. 19:21-26; 27:55-58; Mark 15:41-43; 10:23-27; John 19:38-40.

side to the shield of the Beatitudes. The blessings for the poor and hungry are followed by woeful forebodings for the rich and well fed. The story of the rich man and Lazarus is vivid in the extreme. As far as the text goes the difference between the men was that one was well clothed and satiated while at his gate was the other wretched and desiring food. The rich man is not charged with any overt act. His, evidently, was a sin of omission. The disciples were astonished at the advice given to the rich young ruler and Jesus' comment when the young man turned away. Even the statement that "with God all things are possible" must have left them with the feeling that the rich man, if he got into the kingdom at all, would do so only by the skin of his teeth.

Over against this teaching, uncomfortable for the rich, stand some concrete cases showing Jesus' personal relation to the rich.

Zaccheus was a rich publican. Jesus enjoyed his hospitality and declared, "Today is salvation come to this house," though but half the host's wealth was to be given to the poor. Not much is said in regard to the method of paying the expenses of Jesus' mission but the text seems to indicate that the burden was carried in part by certain well-to-do women who "ministered unto them of their substance." His entertainment by Mary and Martha will be recalled. Whether Mary was the person who anointed him or not, the spikenard, worth somewhat more than fifty dollars, is a clew to the economic status of the

person who offered it. Something should be said of Jesus' dining with Simon the leper and with the Pharisees. After one surveys his relation to poor and rich it is worth some reflection that in the end, when his lifeless body hung upon the tree, two rich aristocrats were the ones who had the courage to obtain the corpse and give it burial.

Immediately related to what he said touching benevolence, the poor, and the rich, are his words concerning

#### 4. Property\*

The weight of the teaching in regard to property is largely in one direction—namely, that they should not bother themselves about it. If a coat is taken in a lawsuit, let the cloak go with it. It is vain to store treasure where it will be stolen or perish. It is worth while to pray for daily bread, though man does not live by bread alone, but beyond that one should not be concerned. The Father will care for his children as he does for the birds. Moreover, wealth tended to prevent the word of the kingdom from bringing forth fruit. The main thing was to seek the kingdom, avoiding everything that stood in the way, knowing that if the chief end were secured, other desirable and necessary possession would come with it. A man's life, "his own self," should not be imperiled in trying to gain the world. It would be unprofitable even if he should succeed at such a cost. Renunciation of all that one had was essential to discipleship—it was impossible to serve two masters. The rebuke to those who followed him for the loaves was direct and effective.

\* Luke 6:29-30; 8:14; 9:3, 25; 10:4; 11:3; 12:13-34; 14:33; 16:9, 11, 13-15; 19:8-9; 21:1-4; 22:35-38; Matt. 5:40; 6:11, 19-34; 10:9; 13:22; 16:26; 26:6-13; Mark 4:19; 6:8-9; 8:36-37; 12:41-44; 14:3-9; John 6:26, 27, 48, 49, 66; 12:1-8.

Jesus, in his farewell discourses, called attention to the advice he had given the Twelve and the Seventy when he sent them forth on their evangelistic tours—that they should not encumber themselves with equipment and that they should trust to the hospitality of the people—but for the events of the immediate future, he tells them to take purse and wallet and sword. Whatever may have been the significance of the weapon, the contrast in the character of the commands indicates that time and circumstance determine whether this world's goods would be a burden or a help. The relative character of the teaching in regard to property is illustrated again in the injunction to the rich young man to sell all and give to the poor, while Zaccheus is commended for offering to distribute half of his wealth. The absolute amount of wealth dwindles into insignificance in the light of the declaration that the widow's gift to the treasury was the largest of all.

Attention has been called to the alleged "waste" of property when Mary broke the box of ointment.

The "mammon of unrighteousness" was to be used to make friends and a faithful discharge of duties connected with its administration was enjoined as a preparation for the receipt of the true riches.

##### 5. The Economic Position of Jesus<sup>1</sup>

It is unnecessary to call attention to the humble circumstances of Jesus' birth and life, but it is worth while to note that he was a different type of man from John

the Baptist. Instead of a prophet eating locusts and wild honey and fasting at times, he was a man who was frequently a guest of the well to do; he ate and drank with his friends while the hostile and hypercritical called him a gluttonous man and a winebibber. His disciples did not fast, a fact that John's followers did not understand. He was not clad in camel's hair, but wore clothes worth dividing among the soldiers who crucified him.

While he had not where to lay his head, there is little or nothing to indicate that he suffered physical hardship through poverty. As indicated above, a number of wealthy women contributed to the support of himself and his followers. The pangs of poverty that arise from inability to ward off distress from loved dependents do not seem to have been his. His mother and brethren apparently were living at the ordinary standard of comfort of the time for the people of Nazareth. At the cross was the disciple whom he loved, to whom he could commend his mother. "And they made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death."

##### 6. The Economic Miracles<sup>2</sup>

The miracles that had to do with the economic relationships of men were relatively few: turning water to wine at Cana, feeding the multitudes with the loaves and fishes, the draughts of fishes, and obtaining the tribute money from the fish's mouth. They indicate Jesus' care for the physical happiness and well-being of men and an attitude toward tax-

<sup>1</sup> Luke 1:48; 2:7, 12, 16; 4:22; 7:34; 8:1-3; 9:58; 11:37; 14:1; 23:49; Matt. 8:20; 11:19; 13:55; 27:55-60; Mark 6:3; 15:41-47; John 19:23-24, 38-42.

<sup>2</sup> John 2:1-11; 6:1-15; 21:6-11; Luke 5:4-11; 9:10-17; Matt. 14:13-23; 15:32-38; 17:24-27; Mark 6:30-46; 8:1-9.

paying little characteristic of many of his modern followers.

#### 7. Miscellaneous Passages

Many scattered references of economic significance can only be mentioned in this connection.

John's advice to the publicans to cease extortion and to the soldiers not to exact anything wrongfully and to be content with their wages will come to mind.<sup>1</sup> There is a reference to wages on a contract basis and to the right of private property in the parable of the employment of the workers in the vineyard who were engaged for different lengths of time, but paid the same wage.<sup>2</sup> A stinging rebuke was given the hypocrites who made pious pretenses and at the same time devoured widows' houses.<sup>3</sup>

The first three gospels suggest that the cleansing of the temple was in large part due to the fact that dishonest rascals were making it a den of robbers; John's account emphasizes the sacrilege of making it a house of merchandise.<sup>4</sup>

Jesus' reply, when the attempt was made to entangle him in the matter of paying tribute to Caesar, may indicate approval of their paying taxes to the emperor, or it may be one of those baffling replies by which he discomfited those who sought to ensnare him.<sup>5</sup> In looking over his whole life one is inclined to conclude that he was not much, if at all, concerned with the relation of the Jews to the Romans, especially in regard to paying tribute or taxes. Here the

subject was thrust upon him; he makes no voluntary utterance touching the matter elsewhere.

The parable of the Talents lends itself so readily as a basis for exhortations to thrifty activity, and the moral of the tale is such a succinct statement of what is likely to happen in a competitive economic régime—such a concise formulation of the law of the survival of the fittest in business—that the rapid reader is in danger of getting the impression that the illustration has some economic significance. A second glance at the context will show that the whole purpose of the story is to stimulate his hearers to prepare for their lord's return in the kingdom of heaven.<sup>6</sup> It would be as much beside the point to regard this parable as an illustration of the importance of business management, as to consider the immediately preceding parable of the Ten Virgins to have been spoken in the interest of good house-keeping. The parable of the Pounds was also told with a view to the coming kingdom. The illustrations and the principle served to drive home the lesson Jesus wished to teach, just as the parable of the rascally Steward served in another connection without implying anything in approval of the conduct of the characters described in the narrative.<sup>7</sup>

The reply<sup>8</sup> to the Pharisees who condemned the disciples because they when hungry plucked ears of grain on the Sabbath and ate suggests that the satisfac-

<sup>1</sup> Luke 3:13-14.

<sup>2</sup> Mark 12:38-40; Luke 20:45-47.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46; John 2:16.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. 22:17; Mark 12:14-17; Luke 20:22-25.

<sup>5</sup> Luke 19:11-28; Matt. 25:14-30.

<sup>6</sup> Matt. 20:13.

<sup>7</sup> Luke 16:1-13.

<sup>8</sup> Matt. 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5.



tion of real economic need is of more consequence than the punctilious observance of formal rules.<sup>1</sup>

This rapid analysis of Jesus' economic teaching brings to light some points of prime importance. In the first place, he taught his hearers that they should practice unlimited benevolence, sharing their goods in unstinted fashion with those who might need them. There is not much use in trying to explain this away as a form of oriental exaggeration and a striving after oratorical effect. Oriental rhetoric would not have worried the members of his audiences. They were stirred up because they believed Jesus meant what he said. The same thing is true in respect to his attitude toward property. His followers were not to be concerned about it. That is what he taught as his hearers understood him. Current attempts to extract maxims of thrift and industry with a view to accumulating wealth from the four gospels are fruitless. They are not there. Jesus taught that his hearers should give away their wealth to the needy and not worry about gaining more.

To the poor the glad tidings of the kingdom were addressed. They were to be great beneficiaries when the kingdom should come. Economic relief was promised them repeatedly, and the best preparation for membership in the kingdom on the part of the rich was to anticipate the new era by giving to help the poor.

On the other hand, the rich were in a

dangerous position. The presumption was against them and the burden of proof that they were fit for the kingdom rested upon themselves. The outlook for the well to do was not reassuring. Though many might enter the new kingdom, it was only because with God all things are possible; and of this Jesus' relations with a number of rich men and women are interesting illustrations. Possession of wealth was of no advantage: it might easily be and was regarded as a disadvantage, a risk of something in addition to disgrace to die rich when others in need were unrelieved.

The economic program of Jesus was radical and brief, and without constructive features so far as the creation of wealth or the methods of production were concerned. There was nothing in it of the organization of industry individually or socially. This was the nature of his economic teaching to his generation—the answer to the first of the three questions to which a reply is to be made.

## **II. The Kingdom of Heaven Is at Hand**

The second inquiry of present concern is in regard to the fundamental conception represented by the expression "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" upon which Jesus' economic teaching rested.

It requires but a superficial knowledge of Jewish feeling at the opening of the Christian era to know that anticipation of an impending change was in the air. Many of the devout were looking for "the consolation of Israel" and "the redemption of Jerusalem." The heavy

<sup>1</sup> Much has been said concerning the fact that Judas carried the bag and acted as the treasurer of the company. Attempts have been made to see in this a communistic organization of Master and disciples. The statement is neglected here because it appears to have been dictated by sheer convenience.

hand of the foreigner was to be lifted and the glory of the ancient kingdom would be revived.

Into an atmosphere surcharged with expectancy came John and Jesus, preaching the gospel, the good news that the kingdom was at hand.

In contrast with this early expectation is a modern, popular notion in regard to the character of the kingdom that was announced. The idea is widespread that there is justification in the text for looking upon the kingdom of God, one aspect of it at least, as a subjective state, as a condition of the inner man, a spiritual attitude, a matter of the heart and mind. The text does say, "The kingdom of God is within you," but the marginal rendering would change "within" to "in the midst of you." The remark was addressed to the Pharisees.<sup>1</sup> No one is likely to believe, on second thought, that the kingdom was within them in any sense. Moreover, the context following clearly refers to the coming kingdom as a real and objective phenomenon. There is no other passage in the gospels of similar apparent teaching. The strength of the idea rests on a translation of a preposition that results in an impossible assertion, when another equally probable rendering would make a consistent statement. With an erroneous choice of words in its favor and everything else against it, the notion ought to be abandoned. Jesus believed the heralds of the new kingdom were in the midst of them already.

The popular feeling in regard to the

approach of the kingdom was shown by the attempt to force Jesus to become king, by the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and the inscription over the cross.

A changed heart was an essential to entrance to the new kingdom, where the righteous were to be, those who were as little children, the poor in purse and spirit, those who do the will of the Father. It is of great significance in this connection that a test for admission to the kingdom was concrete benevolence, and exclusion was due to failure to help fellow-men.<sup>2</sup> A discussion of the disqualifications, however, would contribute little to the present purpose.

It is of consequence to note that the rule of the kingdom to be was service of others.<sup>3</sup> The chief was to be the servant of all. Matters of right and rank were absorbed in matters of duty.

A grasp of the significance of the passages in which it was declared that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" as a means of understanding Jesus' economic teaching is of prime importance.<sup>4</sup>

John came first with the stirring announcement that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand." When Jesus began to preach, the same reason was assigned for repentance. The wonders that he did were declared to be signs of the kingdom's nearness. It was anticipated before the disciples should have gone through the cities of Israel. That generation was to have seen the change, that is, "There are some of them that stand here, who shall in no wise taste death, till they see the Son of man

<sup>1</sup> Luke 17:20-37.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 25:31-46.

<sup>3</sup> Luke 22:26.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. 3:2; 4:17; Mark 1:15; Luke 11:20; Matt. 12:28; 10:7; 10:23; 16:27; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; 10:8-11; John 14:2, 3, 18, 19, 28; 16:16-22; Luke 12:31-40, 56; Matt. 24:37-44; Mark 13:33-37; Luke 21:34-36; Matt. 24:45; 25:1-28.

coming in his kingdom." Constantly, directly and indirectly in parables, his hearers are warned to be ready. The multitudes were charged with lack of ability to interpret the times. The marginal translation that would substitute "the consummation of the age" for the expression "the end of the world" would enable the reader more easily to avoid the error of injecting into the text a meaning based upon modern ideas in respect to the duration of the world. We expect the general conditions of the present to prevail indefinitely into the future. On the contrary, Jesus taught the people of his day that their time was coming to an end, and upon their asking him, "When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and 'of the consummation of the age'?" he describes a number of events that were to take place before the close of the era, and then said, "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished." He was to go away from them "a little while" but he would return again.

This doctrine, that the change to the new kingdom would soon come, which was preached by John and Jesus and believed by their followers, was the idea upon which certain features of their teachings in regard to property and methods of benevolence were based. With their outlook the material things of the world were lightly held, and the relief of the needy was urged along the lines of temporary measures to tide them over the expected brief interval.

The kingdom was in no sense a development from the existing economic order. It was to be brought in by divine

power. Jesus' servants did not fight to prevent the Jews from taking him because his kingdom was "not of this world," but from a heavenly source.

Two limitations on Jesus' power and knowledge in regard to the kingdom stand out with great significance in the text.

When the mother of the sons of Zebedee sought preferment for her children and asked Jesus if they might occupy places of honor in the kingdom, Jesus replied, "To sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give, but it is for them for whom it hath been prepared of my Father."<sup>1</sup>

The second limitation is of more importance in the present connection. After Jesus had pointed out the signs that were to indicate the approach of "the consummation of the age," he declared, "Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. But of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only."<sup>2</sup> The words "neither the Son" are omitted by some ancient authorities from Matthew but there is no question about them as they appear in Mark. This declaration by Jesus that he did not know when the kingdom was to come is one that may be differently interpreted by students with different outlooks. Those who believe Jesus divine in the fullest sense may regard it simply as an evidence of how fully he took upon himself the most significant characteristic of human nature, the inability to forecast the future, and shared thus in humanity's

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 20:20-23; Mark 10:35-45.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 24:36; Mark 13:32.

greatest weakness. To those who emphasize the humanity of Jesus, the saying is not a hard one. In this discussion the simple fact that he did not know when the kingdom was to come is all that is of concern. The declaration from his own lips is conclusive. This absence of exact knowledge of when the kingdom was to come taken in connection with his expectation that it would come before the existing generation should pass away—the two points that Jesus did not know exactly when the new order would be ushered in but that he expected it in the immediate future—constitute an important element of the fundamental basis upon which his economic teaching rested and furnish the key to its interpretation. They throw light upon what he omits as well as upon the peculiar character of what he has to say. His economic program was concerned with merely transient conditions that he believed were to pass away never to return, due to a change that was to be the result of divine intervention, not of economic development nor due to economic reform.

### **III. Modern Christianity and Economic Reform**

#### **1. The Nature of the Economic Program Presented in the Four Gospels**

It may well be said at the outset that Jesus of Nazareth was not the founder of a new school of economic thought nor the author of a program of specific economic reform. It ought also to be said immediately that the religious ideas he preached to the people of his time carry with them certain unmistakable implications that must necessarily affect the economic conduct of his followers. His religion had something to do with a man's private life, economic and other-

wise. The second of the great commandments, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Mark 20:32), upon which stress was laid, covers the whole of human relationships and bears with peculiar force upon economic activity in which, obviously, the bond between men is subjected to great strain. This imperative declaration indicates the spirit demanded in economic life.

The method of application of any great principle to the solution of concrete economic problems necessarily depends upon the conditions under which men are living at the time in question, or the conditions under which they think they are living. Upon this point there is no need to remain in doubt in the case of Jesus and his disciples. They believed that theirs was a peculiar time in the world's history. They were face to face with a cosmic crisis. The kingdom of heaven was at hand.

Upon these two principles, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," and, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand," was based the injunctions in respect to economic conduct whose nature is under consideration. The end in view was social solidarity in a temporary state of affairs. This being true, one need not expect to find any elaborate scheme to revolutionize current methods of production; nor is there any more to be said in respect to consumption of wealth. The field of distribution, i.e., the division of the results of production among those who contribute to the outcome, is untouched in a constructive way. In fact, the matter that makes up the bulk of a treatise on economics is not discussed in the four gospels. The existing economic order was doomed to pass away for

reasons other than economic before some of those who heard Jesus' words should taste death. If the obtaining scheme of things was so lacking in permanence, it would be fruitless to seek reforms through alterations in the social organization. The new order was not to be the result of an evolution out of the existing one, but to be brought about by a beneficent, cataclysmic change, divinely ordained and executed. The anticipated intervention of God renders superfluous human attempts at social reconstruction. One will look in vain in writings of the evangelists for the characteristic features of much of the literature of modern economic reform. Brotherliness in a temporary condition to be speedily relieved by divine power—this is the essence of the economic teaching of the four gospels.

There is nothing incongruous in Jesus' teaching in regard to benevolence<sup>1</sup> when the situation as it presented itself to him is taken into consideration. The almost reckless sort of giving there enjoined—giving that would disturb the spirit of the present-day charity expert—is in accord with his outlook on his future. All cases to him were emergency cases—all were cases for temporary relief. There was nothing permanent about the whole situation. There was no danger of destroying self-respect and bringing on succeeding generations of paupers. The existing generation was the final one under the old régime. The obvious thing to do was to make life more endurable for the distressed while it lasted. It would not last long.

The good tidings that were preached to the poor conveyed the message that the coming kingdom would make an end of the wretchedness that was filling their lives. Those who gave aid and comfort to the unfortunate would find reward in the better time that was coming and coming soon.

When one balances the teaching in regard to the rich over against the significance of Jesus' personal relations with the wealthy, the conclusion is inevitable that he felt the rich were subjected to extraordinary temptations, but that the character of the man, not his material possessions, was decisive. Obedience to the second great commandment was the test. The selfish rich (and the rich were likely to be selfish) were doomed; but the cases like Zaccheus and Joseph of Arimathea are perfectly clear.

In no other part of his teaching did Jesus show his attitude toward the existing state of affairs so clearly as in his discussions in regard to property. The pursuit of wealth is a game not worth the candle. Repeatedly his followers are warned against the deceitfulness of riches and the peril of losing themselves in their search. In view of the speedy passing of the things of this world it would be sheer folly to put energy and life into the accumulation of goods and the building of barns. Worry and fret over the wherewithal of food and clothing had no place in a program based upon the assumption that divine intervention was imminent. His hearers were advised, not merely to refrain from the pursuit of material things, but to sell

<sup>1</sup> Almsgiving was commonly regarded as a virtue in Jesus' time. He differed from others in degree and, perhaps, in spirit in his teachings on this point.

what they had and give alms; to seek treasures in heaven that the heart might be there also.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus' neglect of, and warning against the dangers of, property have nothing to do with the question of the right of private property. The latter is referred to but the point as discussed by modern writers is not taken up.

One need not expect to find in the gospels a discussion of usury, the mediaeval churchmen's bone of contention. Jesus advised his followers to lend without expecting to get the principal back, not to mention interest.

In this brief statement is to be found the essence of the economic program presented by Jesus to his followers. The stronger were to act as brothers to their fellow-men; helping the weaker economically by sharing with them whatever of the good things of life that were available; avoiding absorption in the material interests of the present lest they should interfere with the attainment of the kingdom; and all this with a view to an early change of social conditions by divine intervention. In this new kingdom service of others was to have been the characteristic feature.

## **2. The Early Christian Program and That of Christian Socialism**

When one compares the economic program of Jesus with that of the modern Christian Socialists, there are some points of likeness and difference that are worth noting.

The Christian Socialist propaganda is primarily a humanitarian movement, in-

spired by a sense of the brotherhood of men and sympathy for those who secure the least advantageous places in the competitive race. In the complexity of modern economic conditions distress comes upon great numbers of persons without, or with, apparent fault of their own. Men, imbued with the spirit of the second great commandment, are touched with the suffering of their fellows, and hope for and are willing to work for deliverance. In this they are reproducing the spirit of Jesus' teaching to his contemporaries.

The likeness between the Christian Socialists and Jesus ceases when departure is made from the state of feeling to practical measures to relieve the situation. Jesus believed that speedy, divine intervention would end the unhappy condition of the unfortunate. The Socialists ordinarily do not expect immediate relief, and look to a scheme of social control and management of the instruments of production and of the processes of distribution of wealth as a means of ameliorating the evils of society. It is perfectly plain, therefore, that while the spirit of Christian socialism is that of Jesus, it cannot in any sense rest its case for its constructive program on the authority of his name. He has nothing to say about social control of production. The distribution of the product of labor among the producers is a problem with which he never was concerned. The positive program of the Socialists has no religious sanction behind it. Its validity depends entirely upon economic considerations.

<sup>1</sup> Doubtless with any other anticipation for the future Jesus would have made property secondary to spiritual relationships. His expectations, being as they were, resulted in his excessive discounting of wealth.

It is essential to clear thinking that this distinction be sharply made. That the brotherhood of men should be acknowledged and made real is to assert one thing. To say that direct social control of the production and distribution of wealth would secure this end, or is the best way through which to secure it, is to make a very different declaration. The first may well be called Christian. Jesus knew nothing about the second so far as his sayings have been reported to us.

The outlook of all modern reformers is so different from that of Jesus that it is not to be expected that their programs can be discovered in embryo in his teachings. To most of them the kingdom of heaven has been pushed forward into the eternity of the future or has become a figure of speech. Better conditions are expected to result from human action and that largely through a process of development. His spirit presses men forward to the relief of their distressed neighbors, but the method of securing this betterment through a reorganization of economic institutions must be determined by the men of today confronted with the existing economic situation. The Master's words contain no concrete suggestions. The proposals of Christian Socialists must be submitted to the simple question: Taking known conditions into consideration, is it probable that the schemes suggested are the best means of securing the desired end? Sympathy and a feeling of brotherhood will not help answer such a question.

This is no place to discuss the relative merits of the claims of socialism. It is desired merely to indicate that the Christian Socialists are in the same situation

as other Socialists in respect to the strength of their position. Their religious affiliations add nothing to the force of their arguments. Anyone who loves mankind and is willing to put his feeling into deeds, and at the same time regards a minimum amount of governmental activity as essential to social progress, might well call himself a Christian individualist. But he would not strengthen the individualistic philosophy thereby. It would still have to stand on its own feet. Economically, the term Christian implies a devotion to the well-being of society and a willingness to put forth effort to secure it. The instrument used, the policy adopted, is no more or less Christian than a tool or a mechanism, such as an ax or a locomotive, used for the benefit of men. Any person who has an affection for his kind sufficiently robust to make him help them has as good a claim as any other to the title of Christian, from the economic point of view, whether he is an individualist or a Socialist or declines to support unqualifiedly either set of dogmas.

### **3. The Modern Christian and Economic Reform**

It is apparent that it is not possible for one to be a follower of Jesus without having an interest in the economic well-being of his fellow-men. Jesus was not only concerned with the distress of the people around him, but took active measures to relieve the unfortunate. The bulk of his teachings looking toward the amelioration of harsh conditions is so great that there can be no mistake about its significance. The Christian is not at liberty to sit down in resignation and endure the current evils while he dreams of a glorious city where there is

to be no hunger and thirst, and where the tears are to be wiped from all eyes. Pious *laissez faire* is out of the question.

If active interest is imperative, what is the nature of the activity demanded? To this question religion can give no concrete reply. Its function is to supply the motive force that impels to action; the method of applying this force is to be discovered by effort. The careful study of economic and sociological problems in the light of human knowledge respecting man and his environment may be expected to bring forth effective schemes for social betterment. There should be no balking at the difficulties of the situation, or waiting until one can find the panacea for all the prevalent social ills.

One need not see the end from the beginning. Diligent study of what others have tried to do will enable one to avoid many a mistake, and mistakes made in spite of the best efforts of intelligence will enable one to warn others against wrong methods. Well-exercised brains and hearts turn out products of value whether they are positive or negative. Society will not be revolutionized in a hurry. It will take time for the leaven to spread through the whole lump. There is available now enough knowledge to enable the earnest Christian to make a beginning, but it is not in the gospels. He must turn to men and women who have worked and thought and written for the betterment of men under modern conditions.

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## CHRISTIANITY AND POLITICS

### III

## THE SOCIAL IDEALS OF SCHOLASTICISM

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There were no Dark Ages in the old acceptance of the term. The culture of the few was in the Middle Ages finding acceptance by the many. And from Augustine to Luther the imperial ecclesiastical power was the bearer of that culture to the masses. From the time of Charlemagne onward, the school and university were important centers of growing enlightenment. The authority was so sure of itself and was so linked with the learning of the past that speculation was free and daring to an

extraordinary degree. Nevertheless the basis of life was an external authority. The thought of the period was free only within the bounds of a closed system. Nor was the limitation felt, because the closed system and the external authority were accepted by all, or nearly all, much as obedient children accept the authority of father and mother. Even when the authority of the moment was disputed it was always in the name of the imperial ecclesiastical tradition against which none thought of